UNITED NATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS SECTION

NGO/DPI/SB/90/10

DAG HAMMARSKJOLD LIBRARY: ITS SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS

(Not an official record or press release. This summary is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free dissemination).

On 15 March 1990, Mr. Jakob van Heijst, Director, Dag Hammarskjöld Library, United Nations, briefed NGO representatives on the services and the development plans of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library (DHL).

Mr. van Heijst began his briefing by referring to the Library's official duty, as defined by the General Assembly in 1949: "The Library's primary function is to enable the delegations, Secretariat and other official groups of the Organization to obtain, with the greatest possible speed, convenience and economy, the library materials and information needed in the execution of their duties".

The Library, Mr. van Heijst said, was founded on 16 November 1961 in honour of the late Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld. The Library building was a gift from the Ford Foundation. The staff consists of about 140 people who are able to be of assistance in some 40 languages, according to Mr. van Heijst. Staff members of the United Nations system and delegations as well as NGO representatives are welcome to use the DHL services.

First, Mr. van Heijst described the base from which these services are presented, i.e. the library's collections. There are two parts to be distinguished: on the one hand the collection of materials of the United Nations and on the other the acquired general collections (non-UN). The first collection consists of a complete archive of all documents and publications issued by the United Nations as well as its main and subsidiary organs and bodies. The materials are retained in all languages in which they are issued and in all distribution categories. Mr. van Heijst gave some examples of the types of material the United Nations collection includes: documents and proceedings of conferences; annual activity reports; financial and budget

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statements; reports of the regional centres on research programmes; texts of treaties and other legal instruments; and press releases. The total number of items, Mr. van Heijst said, is estimated to be between 3.5 and 4 million items, with approximately 130,000 pieces being edited each year.

Furthermore, Mr. van Heijst gave an overview of the Library's second collection, the non-UN materials. These include books, periodicals, newspapers and other materials which are of permanent as well as current interest to support the Organization's programmes or activities. The collections embrace subjects such as political affairs, international law, economic and social development, apartheid, disarmament and other issues related to the work of the United Nations. A considerable amount of the collection (about half a million volumes), Mr. van Heijst said, consists of government documents like development plans and statistical material.

In addition to acquiring materials from its own collections, the Library also procures publications in support of United Nations technical assistance projects. This, Mr. van Heijst said, is mostly for the benefit of Third World countries. The supply of such publications, he explained, is part of the overall support of providing equipment and material requisite for the execution of projects in developing countries.

Secondly, Mr. van Heijst gave an overview of the direct services the Library can provide. All materials may be consulted in the three reading rooms of the Library: (a) the Periodicals Reading Room on the first basement floor; (b) the General Reference room with its non-circulating collection on the first level; and (c) the Woodrow Wilson Reading Room on the second floor. Library materials, with the exception of reference works, may be used off premises, too. Articles from periodicals and books which are not in the Library's collection can be provided by its Interlibrary Loan Service.

With regard to reference assistance, Mr. van Heijst mentioned three possible resources: (a) the General Reference Desk; (b) on-line services; and (c) catalogues. At the General Reference Desk, reading lists and bibliographies on subjects of current interest to the Organization are available. The Library can also provide several on-line services by means of its own information system, the United Nations Bibliographical Information System (UNBIS), as well as by means of direct access to external third-party databases. UNBIS provides access to bibliographic and factual information about publications and documents of the United Nations, as well as access to the external materials acquired by the Library. In this way, Mr. van Heijst explained, it is, for example, possible for a user to view and print the full text of the resolutions of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. A user could also easily be informed about the voting pattern of one or more countries, since results of votings are immediately transmitted by computer to the Library's file. The third reference resource are the catalogues which are located in the General Reference area. The catalogues provide access to materials in the General Collection and the Legal, Map and Statistical Reference collections.

Mr. van Heijst stressed that most reference information is also available in 40 of the Permanent Missions to the United Nations. Furthermore, he said, the non-restricted information of the Library's database will be available within two months to the United States and Canada and other continents as well. This is the result of a contract which was recently signed by the Research Libraries Group.

In outlining the development plans for the reorganization of the storage of the United Nations' documents, Mr. van Heijst said that an ambitious plan is being developed by DCS, of which DHL is a division.
This plan will enable them to store documents on the optical disc. Through a world-wide system of datacommunication, the different duty stations will gain access to the documents. It will accelerate the whole process. In the last few months two pilot projects on the storage of documents on optical disc have been carried out: one in Geneva on the storage of United Nations documents and one in New York on the storage of personnel records. The results of the pilot projects were convincing: the optical disc technology provides good solutions, especially for the storage of documents, Mr. van Heijst said.

He stressed that the rapidly changing needs and increased technical possibilities in the information sector require the United Nations Libraries to start a process of internal organizational restructuring and professional reorientation. According to Mr. van Heijst libraries ought to function as a network of co-operating information centres: on the one hand producing and processing data; on the other supporting its users in regard to their need for documentary and factual information. In order to achieve this, user-oriented co-operation between the libraries at New York Headquarters, at Geneva and Vienna will be strengthened, he said. Another goal is to improve the co-operation with other international libraries and also to expand the use of the non-U.N. services .

Mr. van Heijst concluded by pointing to one of the technological innovations the Library has already concluded to introduce: the Compact Disc Read Only Memory (CD-ROM). In the future, the databases, especially the part which provides access to the documents, will be produced on this compact disc as well. At the moment a main goal of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library is to enhance greater access to its information resources to persons and bodies outside the Organization, Mr. van Heijst said.

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THE STRUGGLE AGAINST APARTHEID

(Not an official record or press release. This summary is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free dissemination).

On 22 March 1990, Mr. Abdennour Abrous, Chief of Branch for Publicity Assistance and Promotion of International Action, Centre Against Apartheid, briefed NGO representatives on UN action against apartheid.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Abrous noted that the issue of apartheid was first brought up in the United Nations in 1946. Since then the Special Committee Against Apartheid, in co-operation with the Organization of African Unity and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, has played an instrumental role in shaping and implementing United Nations policy on apartheid, Mr. Abrous said. Furthermore, the Committee also plays a key role in the promotion of international campaigns against apartheid.

United Nations action, Mr. Abrous explained, has taken place system-wide: involving the General Assembly, its main subsidiary organs, the Special Committee on Apartheid, the Security Council, the Commission on Human Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the ad hoc group of experts on southern Africa, the specialized agencies, etc. All these organs have initiated action and kept up the pressure on the Pretoria government.

According to Mr. Abrous, three factors caused the new turn of events which make a negotiated settlement possible:

(a) The heroic and protracted struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa and their national liberation movements.
(b) The international pressure resulting from sanction against South Africa by the international community and the United Nations; and last but not least;
(c) The new spirit of political accommodation and co-operation among countries, large and small, in support of fundamental freedoms, human rights and democracy.

Mr. Abrous also said it should not be forgotten that the accord on Namibia and Angola has unlocked the situation in South Africa.

He discussed the four major areas in which the main tenets of United Nations action against apartheid fall: (a) Political; (b) Legal; (c) Publicity; and (d) Humanitarian Assistance. In the political field, Mr. Abrous said, the United Nations has evolved a policy platform based on measures and sanctions, as the best peaceful means available to bring apartheid to an end. As a result it became increasingly difficult for South Africa to function internationally. The measures taken by the United Nations have increased the costs of apartheid ; e.g. South Africa's oil bill loan increased to two billion dollars a year, simply because the oil had to be bought on the spot market in Rotterdam.

In 1974, United Nations political pressure culminated in the suspension of South Africa from the proceedings of the General Assembly. In 1977, the Security Council adopted a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa - the first time such an action had been taken against a Member State, Mr. Abrous said. Furthermore, additional pressure on the South African government took the form of international legal instruments, i.e., the International Convention on the Punishment and Suppression of the Crime of Apartheid and the International Convention Against Apartheid in Sports. Both conventions have long entered into force.

In the field of publicity, according to Mr. Abrous, the United Nations effectively drew attention to South Africa and mobilized international public opinion against apartheid. Today, apartheid is universally condemned and the Pretoria authorities are distancing themselves from it and have committed themselves to change through negotiations, Mr. Abrous said. The United Nations has also provided the liberation movements with political, moral and material support, as well as a forum where they can voice their grievances.

With regard to humanitarian assistance, Mr. Abrous noted that the United Nations has devised significant programmes of humanitarian, legal and educational assistance to victims of apartheid. These programmes have not only enabled thousands of them to survive but also to keep hope alive, Mr. Abrous said.

Mr. Abrous explained the change in international relations which has taken place over the past few years and the impact this has had on United Nations action. According to Mr. Abrous, an accelerated change dates back to the INF accord and the super-Powers'agreement to search systematically for the peaceful settlement of conflicts. A very significant aspect here is the fact that not only were the old Cold War rivalries set aside, but the super-Powers also decided to co-guarantee whatever agreement was arrived at between contending parties to regional and other conflicts.

Another reason for the acceleration in history, Mr. Abrous said, is that there is now a consensus among the five permanent members of the Security Council. This enables the Council to move with speed and come up with decisions to encourage and promote peaceful settlements in various areas. Consequently, the United Nations is finally able to use its machinery to a greater extent, under conditions similar to those that prevailed at the establishment of the Organization.

A third reason, Mr. Abrous pointed out, concerned the almost world-wide need for economic and social restructuring. As a result, he said, there seems to be a world-wide shift in focus from foreign affairs to domestic issues. Mr. Abrous indicated that economic competition has brought

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the issue of world-wide resource management to the top of the international agenda. One of the results of the change of focus in international relations is that a greater use is now being made of the United Nations machinery for peace-keeping and peace-making, Mr. Abrous said. In many transnational issues, the United Nations provides the best machinery within which action can take place. In this context, he referred to the potential roles for the United Nations in Cambodia and Western Sahara, and the crucial role played by the Organization in Namibia's transition to independence and the supervision of the recent elections in Nicaragua.

In December 1989, Mr. Abrous said, international concern for a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in South Africa was dramatized when the special session of the General assembly adopted, by consensus, a Declaration on South Africa. This declaration puts forth principles and guidelines for the dismantling of apartheid and the creation of a united non-racial and democratic South Africa. It commits the Member States, individually and collectively, to maintain pressure on Pretoria until there is "a profound and irreversible change".

Mr. Abrous explained that to encourage negotiations the General Assembly called on the Pretoria authorities to enact the following measures:

(a) Release all political prisoners and detainees unconditionally, and refrain from imposing any restrictions on them;
(b) Lift all bans and restrictions on all proscribed and restricted organizations and persons;
(c) Remove all troops from the townships;
(d) End the state of emergency and repeal all legislation, such as the Internal Security Act, designed to circumscribe political activity;
(e) Cease all political trials and political executions.

On 2 February 1990, South Africa's President de Klerk announced a set of important measures: the release of Nelson Mandela and other prisoners; the un-banning of the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) and other political parties and organizations; and the suspension of death sentences. The Special Committee on Apartheid stressed that even though these steps were encouraging, they should be followed by the remaining measures required for the establishment of an appropriate climate for negotiations as stated in the declaration. At the same time, Mr. Abrous said, the Special Committee welcomed the decision of the ANC to meet with the representatives of Pretoria on 11 April 1990 to discuss the removal of remaining obstacles to negotiations. With regard to sanctions, Mr. Abrous informed the NGOs that the Committee does not find it appropriate to lift them at this stage.

Mr. Abrous concluded his briefing by taking a quick look into the future. In his view, the Declaration on South Africa is likely to remain the main instrument at the disposal of the international community to facilitate and promote negotiations among all parties concerned. It provides a broad framework for negotiations as well as a Bill of Rights to guarantee the rights, freedoms and civil liberties of all citizens, he said. Therefore, Mr. Abrous concluded, its logical outcome should be the adoption of a new constitution of South Africa based on the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. After these changes have been carried out, Mr. Abrous foresees South Africa's full participation in the work of the United Nations.